



Guide to Selecting Tools and Techniques (Applied Multicriteria Analysis)

Selecting which tools and techniques you should use during your needs assessment will depend on several factors. By rating each of the factors individually, you can attain a quality estimate of which tools and techniques are going to be of the most value. There are, unfortunately, no scientific formulas that guarantee success although assessing each of the factors will help you decide which tools and techniques will be most helpful (see tables A.5.1 and A.5.2).

Appropriateness

The appropriateness of the tool or technique depends on the information you require and the decisions you are hoping to make on the basis of your needs assessment. For instance, ask yourself these questions:

- ✓ How effective is the tool or technique for collecting the necessary information or making a decision?

Table A.5.1 Tools and Techniques Selection Rating

Instructions: Rate each selection factor on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing the minimum and 10 representing the maximum value for each factor. For example, if using the card sorting tool is highly appropriate for facilitating a decision, it would get a score of 9 or 10; likewise, if you have little experience in conducting a card sort, then it may be rated as a 2 or 3.

Tools and techniques being considered	Selection factor (scored on a scale of 1 to 10)					Total	Rank
	Appropriateness	Costs and benefits	Feasibility	Acceptability	Experience		

Source: Based on Stolovich and Keeps (2009).

Table A.5.2 Example of the Tools and Techniques Selection Rating

Tools and techniques being considered	Selection factor (scored on a scale of 1 to 10)					Total	Rank
	Appropriateness	Costs and benefits	Feasibility	Acceptability	Experience		
World Café	4	7	7	5	4	27	4
Fishbone diagram	6	7	6	5	4	28	3
Focus group	7	5	7	9	5	33	1
Interview	7	4	5	9	6	31	2

Note: Consider applying the techniques of multicriteria analysis to your decisions about which tools and techniques to use in your needs assessment. All you have to do is apply a weight to each selection factor to help you prioritize those that are the most essential to your decisions regarding which tools and techniques to use in your needs assessment. To do so, you simply weight each of the five selection factors (appropriateness, costs and benefits, feasibility, and so on) on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most critical factors in your decision. Then divide each weighting by 50. For instance, if acceptability to participants is especially important within your organization, then you may wish to weight the factor with an 8 ($8 \div 50 = .16$). Score each of the tools and techniques being considered, and multiply all of the scored items by the factor weighting. For instance, in this example, World Café had an acceptability score of 5, and acceptability had a weight of .16. Thus, the final score of the acceptability of the World Café technique is 4.84.

- ✓ How efficient is the tool or technique for helping make a decision?
- ✓ Does the tool or technique complement the other activities you are planning to use to collect information or to make a decision during your needs assessment?

Costs and Benefits

The ratio of costs to benefits can help you determine (a) when simple needs assessment tools or techniques may make more sense than complex processes or (b) when the value of benefits suggest that you should use more sophisticated processes. For instance, ask yourself these questions:

- ✓ What are the potential costs associated with the tool or technique (for instance, time, money, opportunity costs)?
- ✓ How do those costs relate to the potential value that the tool or technique can add to your needs assessment (for example, generating buy-in, involving stakeholders, collecting more accurate information)?

Feasibility

Routinely, even the best-suited tools and techniques for your needs assessment may not be feasible in the organizational environment. Be aware of the many factors that can influence the feasibility of choosing one tool or technique over another. For instance, ask yourself these questions:

- ✓ How likely is it that the tool or technique can be applied successfully?
- ✓ Will social, political, technological, cultural, or legal factors potentially limit the use of the tool or technique during your needs assessment?

Acceptability

Whichever needs assessment tools and techniques you choose to use in your assessment, they must also be viewed as acceptable by the multiple partners who are part of your assessment effort. For instance, ask yourself these questions:

- ✓ Will the tool or technique be acceptable to those who will participate in the process?

- ✓ Will internal and external partners view the use of the tool or technique as an acceptable way to collect valid information or to make informed decisions?

Experience

Successfully using any of the needs assessment tools and techniques gets easier with experience. Although you don't have to be an expert in data collection or decision making to complete a useful needs assessment, the more experience you have, the easier it will be. For instance, ask yourself these questions:

- ✓ Do you or other members of your needs assessment team have experience in applying the tools or techniques being considered?
- ✓ Will you feel comfortable facilitating the use of the tool or technique during the needs assessment?

Reference

Stolovich, Harold, and Erica Keeps. 2009. "Selecting Solutions to Improve Workplace Performance." In *2007 ASTD Handbook for Workplace Learning Professionals*, edited by E. Beich. Alexandria, VA: ASTD Press.